

NDNU: a University Steeped In Social Justice and Committed to Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion

It is not an overstatement to say that diversity, equity, inclusion (DEI) and social justice are embedded in the university's DNA. After all, two of the Hallmarks created by the learning communities sponsored by the Sisters of Notre Dame de Namur are specifically devoted to social justice and diversity:

"We educate for and act on behalf of justice and peace in the world."

"We embrace the gift of diversity."

"The Sisters of Notre Dame have over 200 years of DEI and social justice experience," says NDNU President Beth Martin, Ph.D. "NDNU has always lived and breathed these values. Right now, the university is in a very good position to move the Sisters' work forward since we are no longer serving an undergraduate population with a set of requirements that graduate programs do not. We have the capacity to reach out to underserved or marginalized populations and communities, such as Indigenous people, Hispanic Americans and older students who are starting their education or changing careers. And that is just a start."

"We're laying the foundation for long-term success and are slowly but surely rolling out programs and initiatives that embody our commitment to these values," adds longtime faculty and staff member Bobby Vaughn, Ph.D.

These initiatives include the Women in Leadership Speaker Series, our partnership with Every Campus a Refuge to house Afghan refugees, outreach to Native American tribal communities, and most recently, our receiving a major federal grant, Promoting Postbaccalaureate Opportunities for Hispanic Americans Program (PPOHA). The latter includes developing a Master of Arts program and graduate certificate in Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) Leadership; wrap-around support services to graduate students, and professional development programs for all faculty that will focus on how to be more culturally-responsive to diverse student populations.

Speaker Series

The recently launched Women in Leadership Speaker Series highlights women in leadership starting with Terri Givens, professor of Political Science, McGill University and Founder of the Center for Higher Education Leadership and Brighter Professional Development who opened the series on October 19th. Future programs will feature Teri Cannon, the founding president of Minerva University, on January 25, 2023; Nandini Nayak, Ph.D., Managing Director and Chief Experience Architect at Accenture, on March 15, 2023, and Nicole Taylor, President and Chief Executive Officer at Silicon Valley Community Foundation on June 14, 2023. The series is free of charge and open to the community.

"We wanted to launch the series with women in executive positions in academia, technology, and the business world," says Beth Martin. "This is really appropriate since the Sisters of Notre Dame have ministered to women's education for centuries."

Housing and Support to Afghan Refugee Families

Earlier this year, NDNU joined Every Campus a Refuge (ECAR) to provide much needed temporary housing to refugee families from Afghanistan, becoming the first university in California to join the

organization. We are also partnering with the International Refugee Committee (IRC), which has been helping to settle refugees around the world for many years.

ECAR campuses not only provide temporary housing, but they also work with the refugee settlement agencies to provide additional services and support to help them. We are currently exploring how we can do more to ensure that our guests have a positive experience on our campus and beyond, and how community volunteers can help with these efforts.

Once again, these efforts cycle back to the Hallmarks, “The Sisters have always had a heart for refugees,” says Beth Martin. “In fact, foundress Saint Julie Billiard was a refugee who helped the sick and needy. We are proud to continue this work.”

Outreach to Tribal Communities

In October, two NDNU staff members attended the National Indian Education Association (NIEA) Convention in Oklahoma City to begin to gauge the possibilities of university-tribal partnerships. As the university focuses more on adult learners and distance learning, the possibility of serving Native American communities that have not always had access to high-quality education is appealing. The university is exploring how we might create programs that meet their needs and are consistent with our expertise and mission.

Based on initial conversations, avenues to pursue include: teaching credentials for paraprofessionals teaching in tribal schools, master’s degree programs in Public Administration, and master’s of business administration degree programs in casino-related industries.

“There are serious needs in education among the tribal communities,” says Bobby Vaughn who attended the conference. “So many Native American children don’t have teachers who are credentialed. Certification is their gateway, and of course, lends itself to a natural affinity with our School of Education. However, before we move forward, we have to learn as much about American Indians, tribal nations, and their priorities. There is so much to learn. We are very excited about these potential partnerships and look forward to building relationships from a foundation of trust and collaboration.”

PPOHA Grant

This is a \$3 million grant over five years that will make improvements and enhance the university’s three graduate programs. The grant encompasses the following:

- Developing a Master of Arts program and Graduate Certificate in Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Leadership to prepare graduate students with the training they need to be successful in leadership roles in education, industry and other professions.
- Providing Wrap-Around Support Services to Graduate Students to assist them in staying enrolled and completing a degree. These services will supplement academic programming by providing counseling, mentoring, career development and financial support.
- Improving Professional Development Opportunities to better support Hispanic and low-income students. This entails developing an ongoing professional development program for full- and part-time instructors that will focus on how to be more culturally responsive to diverse student populations.